

Welcome Wagon's targeted households will get a bound directory delivered to the doorstep, in which businesses will have paid to advertise. The point is to reach more people, Cendant spokesmen say, and these days, people are not at home as much as they used to be, because of busier families and a surge in working mothers.

Cendant, which also owns Avis car rentals and Howard Johnson hotels, has found itself in financial turmoil this year, but the company says its problems are not related to its decision to change the Welcome Wagon.

This change, however, appears to have taken many sales representatives by surprise and was met with sorrow by some of them. Although they were paid for their work, certain representatives regarded it as more of a social mission than a marketing one. For decades, Welcome Wagon thrived on that very ambiguity, getting over the threshold thanks to its neighborly demeanor when other marketers might not.

"My heart is in these home visits," said Dee Strilowich, the company's top-performing salesperson, who has worked for Welcome Wagon in Ridgefield, Conn., and nearby Redding for the last four years. "I loved giving the welcome and greeting to those new movers, new parents, engaged women."

But Cendant insisted that times had changed, which is why it decided last month to end the visits and lay off its representatives. "It's a different world today," said Elliot Bloom, a spokesman for Cendant in Parsippany, N.J. "In the past, 20 years ago, when you knocked on people's doors, Mom was home. Now she's in the work force."

A vice president for Welcome Wagon in New York and two other states agreed. "We had representatives who were beating their heads against the wall because they had the names of several people to go and visit but could never find them at home," said the vice president, Dinah Watson. She said she was offered a severance package, which she will be taking, and added that the 250 representatives she supervised have until the end of this month to decide whether they will stay with the company.

About 500 people will be retained to work in ad sales for Welcome Wagon, Mr. Bloom said. It is being combined with another Cendant company, called Getting to Know You, that specializes in direct mail.

"Whenever you make a change like this, there is some displacement," said Christopher R. Jones, another Cendant spokesman. Representatives have until the end of the year to make their visits, and after that, "we've asked them to stop."

Mrs. Strilowich, who was greeted herself by a Welcome Wagon representative when she moved to Ridgefield 28 years ago, said she has about 200 visits scheduled through December and would complete them all. She said most of the representatives she had spoken to were sorry to see their jobs end so suddenly. "A lot of them are in the same situation I was," she said, adding that she is the primary earner in her family. "They were looking for at least two or three more years."

Some Welcome Wagon representatives expressed anger over the loss of their jobs and the end of their visits with families. "Cendant sacrificed us for the bottom line," said Wendy Amundsen, one of the company's top-selling representatives, in Stamford, Conn. "Sometimes there are just more important things in life than money."

Cendant has been struggling this year with other, much larger business problems, including an accounting error that stripped \$115 million from its 1997 earnings, the subsequent resignations of a host of senior executives, and a stock price that has plunged from \$41.69 in April to \$9 on Friday.

But Mr. Bloom dismissed as "absolute nonsense" any suggestion that Cendant's wider problems has led to the switch in strategy for Welcome Wagon. He said the company had peaked in 1968 with 1.5 million visits a year, but that the number had fallen to 580,000 last year. Still, Cendant has thought enough of the company to pay \$20 million to acquire it in 1995, back when Cendant was known as CUC International and the number of visits was estimated at 500,000 a year.

At the time, CUC said it planned to expand the sales force and did so, adding some 800 positions by this year. The company saw Welcome Wagon as a marketing device for a personal credit-history business it already owned. With little overhead beyond the 100-person management staff, a toll-free number and a World Wide Web site, profits were substantial. And sales representatives, who were paid by the amount of business they solicited from area merchants, could earn as much as \$70,000 a year. Many received benefits as well.

Welcome Wagon took its name from 19th century Conestoga covered wagons that would greet frontier settlers as they arrived, bringing food and fresh water from the nearest village. The company was founded in 1928 in Memphis. This summer, to mark its 70th anniversary, the governors of several states, including Wisconsin, declared part of July "Welcome Wagon Week."

"You will visit households when they're celebrating a move, or an engagement, or the birth of a new child," promises the Welcome Wagon Web site, which so far has not been altered to reflect the newly impersonal nature of the operation. "You will also introduce local businesses to Welcome Wagon's unique, personalized advertising program. What could be more fun."

But now the fun is over, "I thought Welcome Wagon would go on forever," Ms. Amundsen said. "Welcome Wagon is like apple pie, baseball, hot dogs. It's an American institution. I thought I would retire in this job."

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PITTS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SANFORD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SANFORD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. BECERRA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BECERRA addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ON THE PRESIDENT'S TRAVEL PLANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. SOUDER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Speaker, I want to make a brief comment on the census and some of the education things before I make my major points here. It used to be years ago in the schools they taught the Constitution. Constitution said you actually have to count people. You cannot guess.

I have a business undergraduate degree, a business graduate degree as

well. I have worked in the private sector before I came into government. It is far too important and constitutional that we have to count people. We cannot use statistical sampling. It can be part of a procedure to try to establish parameters, but you actually have to have real people to know how to assign block grants and dollars, how to assign congressional districts.

Furthermore, we seem to have lost, in the whole education debate, what our Founding Fathers intended and what we have done here. That is that local parents and local school boards are going to make the decisions on education, not some fountain of wisdom in Washington, where they do not know our kids names, where they do know the differences between the school districts. We cannot micromanage decisions here in Washington.

For the past number of days we have been in session here, we have been waiting to try to get a budget agreement. We have known for months what the final things were going to be that were going to be negotiated. But we have not had those meetings. The President has not been engaged. We have not seen the White House engaged. They have had lots of other matters on their mind. But one of the fundamental questions that we have to ask about this administration in general is, are they focused on the task at hand?

The President has traveled 153 days this year, 32 on vacation, 57 for fundraisers. He has only held two cabinet meetings. Those cabinet meetings, the focus was, well, let us just say the focus of the two cabinet meetings was not on the pending crisis at hand and on the budget debate.

I want to go through, while we are here trying to keep the government open, while we are here trying to negotiate the final settlement, this is what the President did today.

At 2:45, he made a statement which I saw on the south lawn, saying we need to get down to business. We need to get an agreement. Then he boarded the helicopter to get over to Andrews Air Force base. At 4:55 he landed on Wall Street. At 5:05 he boarded a motorcade and departed the Wall Street landing zone en route to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Park Avenue, East 50th Street, New York. At 5:15 he arrives at the Waldorf Astoria hotel and proceeds to a private event. At 5:55 he greets a reception in honor of New York gubernatorial candidate Peter Vallone at the Waldorf Astoria still up on Park Avenue. At 6:45 he boards a motorcade and departs the hotel en route to the Hilton New York Towers, 6th Avenue and West 53rd Street. At 7:30 he greets Democratic Senate Campaign Committee reception in honor of the Democratic senatorial candidate and Congressman CHARLES SCHUMER of New York at the Hilton Tower, by the way, a member of the Committee on the Judiciary that is supposed to be neutral in this, potentially a member of the